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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BAMAKO 000163

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [ML](#)
SUBJECT: PROMINENT TUAREG'S VIEW OF ARAB MILITIAS,
REBELLION, AND AQIM

REF: A. 08 BAMAKO 00239
[B](#). BAMAKO 00003
[C](#). BAMAKO 00063

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) Summary: Abderahmane ag Ghalla, a Kidal Tuareg leader assigned to the Malian consulate in Tamanrasset, Algeria, provided a new spin on Mali's decision to deploy Arab militias against rogue Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim Bahanga. Ag Ghalla said these militias were fielded by northern Malian Arab traffickers interested in ending Bahanga's harassment of Arab run smuggling convoys through northern Mali. Having joined with the Malian military to forcibly oust a common foe, Arab traffickers are now stronger than before and circulating more freely than in the past. Ag Ghalla said that Bahanga is now in Libya, and said Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) leader Iyad ag Ghali was the primary force behind Bahanga's Libyan exile. Ag Ghalla said Iyad himself had lost the confidence of fellow Tuareg rebels, the Malian government, and Algerian mediators. As for the rebellion, ag Ghalla said peace may hold for a year or two, but that significant disorganization in the aftermath of February's mass rebel disarmament did not bode well. Ag Ghalla observed that peace in Kidal, however fleeting, provided an opening for donors to put pressure on Mali and, more specifically, key Tuareg leaders to mobilize local populations against AQIM. End Summary.

Abderahmane ag Ghalla Who?

2.(C) As an Ifoghas Tuareg of the Kel Affella fraction, Abderahmane ag Ghalla belongs to the top drawer of the Kidal Tuareg hierarchy. Kidal's traditional Tuareg leaders - the Intallah family - are also Ifoghas from the Kel Affella fraction (Ref A). During northern Mali's 1991-1996 rebellion ag Ghalla was a leader of the Army for the Liberation of the Azawad (ARLA). He is now among a select group of rehabilitated ex-rebel leaders posted to Malian diplomatic missions abroad. Ag Ghalla's family ties, previous rebel history, and assignment to the Malian consulate in Tamanrasset, Algeria, affords him a unique and remarkable vantage point for tracking events and trends on both sides of Mali's northern border.

3.(C) Ag Ghalla said his role in Tamanrasset mostly involves the provision of citizen services to expatriate Malians. He estimated that 20 percent of the Tuareg population in Kidal hold dual Malian-Algerian nationality. Despite Mali's stated devotion to the decade long process of decentralization, Mali recently centralized all passport issuances in Bamako, effectively making it impossible for Malians in far-flung areas like Kidal to obtain passports. Ag Ghalla said the Malian consulate in Tamanrasset is overwhelmed with Malians

who lack passports - the consulate can only issue travel letters - and non-Malians, mostly of Nigerian and Ghanaian origin, with valid Malian passports obtained through fraudulent means in Bamako. Ag Ghalla said Mali is the only "black" African nation whose citizens are not required to obtain an entry visa for Algeria, making Malian passports an extremely valuable commodity for illegal sub-Saharan migrants.

The Arab Militia Balance Sheet

4.(C) Ag Ghalla believes the Malian government would be hard pressed to dissolve the Malian Arab militia it formed to oust rogue Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim Bahanga from northern Mali.

Unlike Mali's Imghad Tuareg militia, which was created by Malian military Col. Elhedj Gamou in 2008 to counter balance various Tuareg rebel groups, ag Ghalla explained that the Arab militias were financed and equipped by private Arab businessmen in northern Mali for a specific purpose: to free up trafficking routes threatened by Bahanga. According to ag Ghalla, the Tuareg militia led by Col. Gamou has been largely integrated into the Malian military, receiving vehicles, guns, and other equipment from the Malian government. Northern Mali's Arab militias, on the other hand, received their vehicles, fuel and other items from Arab traffickers with a private business interest for ridding the north of Bahanga to reduce risks incurred by smuggling convoys moving across territory haunted by Bahanga and his band.

5.(C) Frustrated by ADC leader ag Ghali's failure to stop

BAMAKO 00000163 002 OF 004

Bahanga's harassing of smuggling convoys operated by Arab traffickers in the north in 2008, Arab leaders offered their services to the Malian government to help combat Bahanga. Mali's decision to move forward with these militias essentially provided Arab traffickers with official government protection and support. Having succeeded in that mission, these militias have a specific interest in retaining their fire-power and Malian military cover for their own activities. When battling Bahanga these militias were reportedly led by an ethnic Arab military officer, Col. Abderahmaneould Meydou. Ag Ghalla said he believed the Arab militia units were now stationed near the Malian-Algerian border town of In Khalil under the command of Col. Lamana Ould Bdou. Lamana is allegedly deeply involved in northern Mali's smuggling trade and is also a close associate of State Security Director Mamy Coulibaly. Lamana had told the Embassy he was creating Arab militias in December 2008 (Ref. B)

The Decline and Fall of Iyad ag Ghali

6.(C) Ag Ghalla cited several other reasons for ag Ghali's diminished stature on northern Mali issues dating from 2008 when ag Ghali returned to Mali from his post with the Malian consulate in Djeddah, Saudi Arabia, ostensibly to help President Toure manage Bahanga's burgeoning rebellion. Interestingly, ag Ghalla's description of ag Ghali's mis-steps closely mirrored an analysis - apparently reached from a completely different angle - provided by Kidal Chamber of Commerce president Abdousalam ag Assalat in Kidal in December (Ref. B). Ag Ghalla said that Mali, Algeria, and fellow Tuaregs believed ag Ghali had returned to Mali to cement Bahanga's release of the four Malian military officers. However, when ag Ghali, Minister of Territorial Administration Kafougouna Kone, and a previously unknown Arab businessman namedould Meloud who has recently emerged as a close confidante of President Toure's, arrived in Kidal, the liberation deal suddenly fell apart, leaving Minister Kone to return with just one of the four Malian military officers.

7.(C) Ag Assalat and ag Ghalla both blamed the reversal squarely on Iyad ag Ghali, whom they viewed as playing a "very negative role." Ag Ghalla said that his Algerian contacts, including the influential Algerian Ambassador to Mali, had been telling him for a long time that ag Ghali was behind Bahanga and everything that went wrong in the region of Kidal. Ag Ghalla said he has now come to believe this assessment.

8.(C) Ag Ghalla also blamed Iyad ag Ghali for deliberately diluting the ADC's command structure to preserve his dominant position over various competing Tuareg rebel factions, including that of Bahanga's Northern Mali Tuareg Alliance for Change (ATNMC). Ag Ghalla reported that in 2008 Minister Kone and the Algerian Ambassador to Mali called ag Ghali back to Bamako from Saudi Arabia to ask him to clarify the ADC's command structure in order to ensure that Mali and Algerian mediators had clear points of contact. Ag Ghalla said ag Ghali refused to admit there were any internal problems within the ADC, and that ag Ghali's refusal to clarify lines of command and responsibility was ag Ghali's way of protecting Bahanga's freedom of movement.

Everything Not Coming Up Roses Quite Yet in Kidal

9.(C) Ag Ghalla observed that there was "no diplomacy" underway in Kidal between Tuaregs, Mali, and the Algerian mediators, and that progress toward implementing the Algiers Accords had stalled since the multiple Tuareg rebel disarmament ceremonies of mid-February. Ag Ghalla attributed this disorder to the nine person Algiers Accords Steering Committee's apparent lack of direction. All of the ADC's representatives to this committee have apparently changed. Ag Ghalla said he believed the three Tuareg members were now Hassan Fagaga, Cheikh ag Aoussa and ADC military commander Moussa Bah, none of whom he believed to be fully literate, save perhaps Bah. New representation also means several important Kidal Tuareg groups, such as the Idnanes and the Taghat Melet, no longer have any representation on the Algiers Accords steering committee. Ag Ghalla said he had already raised this issue with the Algerian Ambassador to Mali as a serious and potentially debilitating problem; the Ambassador responded that he is looking for a way of bringing these leaders back into the Algiers Accords process.

BAMAKO 00000163 003 OF 004

10.(C) Ag Ghalla confirmed that Bahanga was now in Libya, perhaps for "one or two years." Ag Ghalla said he thought it unlikely that Libya would let Bahanga slip away anytime soon and that people in Kidal were "psychologically" opposed to Bahanga's return. Ag Ghalla also said that senior members of the Malian government were debating whether to formally ask for Libya to arrest and extradite Bahanga to Mali to face charges for civilian deaths related to land mines planted by Bahanga in 2007 around Tinzwaten, but said he doubted this would occur. Ag Ghalla believed peace in Kidal would hold for awhile, but said the rebellion in the north would never really come to an end because core rebel demands have not been met.

AQIM and Algeria

11.(C) Ag Ghalla said he frequently queried his Algerian colleagues on Algeria's position toward Moctar bel Moctar, reportedly asking on several occasions: "Isn't he working for you?" Ag Ghalla professed to be as confused as everyone else regarding the Algerian government's reticence to go after bel Moctar's camps in northern Mali. He said he could only conclude that bel Moctar was receiving support from certain quarters of the Algerian government, and then cited bel Moctar's legendary reputation for last minute escapes and

uncanny knack for never being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Ag Ghalla said he did not believe that Algerian leaders in Algiers were fully aware of what Algerian security services in the southern part of the country were up to.

Tuareg Peace Bad for AQIM

12.(C) Ag Ghalla said the end of hostilities between Tuareg rebels and the Malian government in Kidal presented a unique opportunity for western powers to encourage not just the Malian government, but local Tuareg leaders, to put pressure on AQIM. He claimed AQIM had an informal understanding with local communities in northern Mali to leave well enough alone. "Before," said ag Ghalla, "there was an understanding with the people, nothing official, that we are here and we'll do nothing against you on condition that you do nothing to us." Ag Ghalla said this understanding dissolved, at least for a time, during the 2003-2004 hostage crisis involving the GSPC and several dozen European tourists. Ag Ghalla recalled that local Tuareg leaders, not the Malian army, forced then GSPC leader El Para out of northern Mali in large part because the GSPC's decision to bring hostages to northern Mali had violated the group's informal understanding with local populations.

13.(C) For ag Ghalla, one of the dividends of peace in Kidal is the ability of local Tuareg leaders to once again pressure AQIM to leave northern Mali in retaliation for having involved the north in terrorist activity. Ag Ghalla said western governments should gather together key Tuareg leaders to deliver the following demarche: peace in Kidal is returning; donors and others want development to restart, but need help from local leaders to pressure AQIM to release the hostages and vacate northern Mali. This idea is rather similar to the one we relayed to our European colleagues in the days following the January 22 disappearance of four tourists near Anderamboukane (Ref. C).

Comment: Replacing One Security Concern with Another

14.(C) Ag Ghalla filled in some gaps regarding the genesis of northern Mali's ethnic Arab paramilitary units and why the Malian government may have trouble disbanding them now that Bahanga is gone. If ag Ghalla's analysis is correct, it means that Mali joined with Arab traffickers to remove a common enemy: Ibrahim Bahanga. The process of removing Bahanga, therefore, effectively cleared out trafficking routes for Arab smugglers, enhanced Arab smugglers' ties to the Malian military, and organized these groups into a paramilitary force under the aegis of the Malian government. The evident disorder within the Algiers Accords steering committee is also worrisome. Mali has been at this crossroads before - in March 2007 when Tuareg rebels disarmed, only to resume hostilities a few weeks later. With Bahanga out of the picture, Tuareg patience should be a little less fleeting this time around. The marginalization of Idnane and Taghat Melet groups from the steering committee is not a good sign, nor is the apparent appointment of rebel

BAMAKO 00000163 004 OF 004

leaders of questionable competence as committee members.
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